

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 238

By Fitzhugh

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Billy Summers Yates of Dyersburg.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Billy Summers Yates; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Yates was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, dedicated to his beloved Dyersburg, Mr. Yates was a founder and longtime owner of the General Appliance and Furniture Company, a downtown Dyersburg institution which has offered the very best wares, backed by the proprietor's unquestionable integrity, since it first opened in 1948 as General Appliance and Television Company; and

WHEREAS, born December 7, 1925, in the rural Dyer County community of RoEllen, Billy Yates was the only child of the late Nettie Summers Yates and Arthur P. Yates; by the first day of his fourth-grade year, in 1934, his family had moved to Newbern; and

WHEREAS, while the Great Depression ravaged the country, Billy Yates worked as a delivery boy for the Commercial Appeal, sold popcorn for a nickel per bag at the local movie theater, and performed odd jobs, including cooking in a café and cleaning; and

WHEREAS, in 1939, Mr. Yates entered Newbern High School, where he performed admirably both inside and outside the classroom; and

WHEREAS, an excellent student and a leader among his peers, Billy Yates served as the President of his senior class and was voted Best All-Around Boy; and

WHEREAS, as a left guard on the high school football team, Mr. Yates helped his team overcome Dyersburg High School 7-6 in their 1941 contest; the rivalry between the teams had

been greatly exacerbated when, the previous year, Dyersburg's Golden Tornadoes had roundly trounced Newberg 65-0; and

WHEREAS, one day in 1940, Billy Yates asked the manager of the Western Auto Store, then located next door to the Palace Theater where Mr. Yates sold popcorn, for a part-time job; the manager, O. B. Locklear, took Mr. Yates's application, the last one he ever filled out for a job; and

WHEREAS, although neither man knew it at the moment Billy Yates turned in that application, Mr. Locklear would become a great friend, business partner, and highly influential mentor to Mr. Yates; and

WHEREAS, in 1943, Billy Yates graduated third in his class from Newbern High School; he won the American Legion Citizenship Award that year as well; and

WHEREAS, after graduation, Mr. Yates joined the United States Navy, where he served his country for three years with diligence and courage during World War II; and

WHEREAS, once he had discharged his duty to his country and its Navy, Mr. Yates returned to Dyersburg to work in the Western Union Store there; and

WHEREAS, on the advice and encouragement of Mr. Locklear, Billy Yates took advantage of the GI Bill, entering Murray State College in 1946 with the intention of teaching history or attending law school; and

WHEREAS, in January 1948, he and Mr. Locklear entered into a business partnership and opened General Appliance and Television Company in a four-room house on Dyersburg's Market Street; and

WHEREAS, while a Murray State student, Billy Yates met Mary Emmalene Eidson; they were married July 31, 1949, after she graduated from college and he taught school for two years at Dyersburg High School; and

WHEREAS, during World War II, consumers had little access to or ability to buy new appliances but in the decade immediately following the war, the general prosperity and the expansion of industrial production combined to generate a proliferation of appliances, including the new television sets that captured the country's imagination; General Appliance and Television sold the area's very first television; and

WHEREAS, due to Mr. Yates's successful salesmanship and a growing clientele, General Appliance and Television was able to relocate to West Court Street, where the business took over the space once occupied by the Western Auto Store; by 1955, the company had seven employees on its payroll; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Yates and Mr. Locklear formed the General Appliance and Furniture Company in January 1960; on March 1, 1960, the two men opened an even larger store on Court Street in a space once occupied by a furniture concern; and

WHEREAS, despite one of the worst snow storms in Dyersburg history, which struck the day after their store opened in March of 1960, a fire that consumed the store's second-floor warehouse, and all the vicissitudes that typically befall a small business, Mr. Yates and Mr. Locklear enjoyed steady sales, in no small part due to their eminently ethical yet simple business philosophy: "deliver on your promises"; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Yates also abided by a cardinal rule: never open on Thanksgiving, Christmas, the Fourth of July, or Sundays; in addition to his innovative and aggressive sales strategies, he respected his own and his employees' needs for rest, relaxation, and time with family and loved ones; and

WHEREAS, his ambition and love for making a sale was always tempered by a deep and humane respect for his customers and his employees; and

WHEREAS, the Dyersburg Jaycees named Mr. Yates the 1968 Boss of the Year in recognition of the relationship he cultivated with his employees; and

WHEREAS, a valued member of numerous professional organizations, Billy Yates became active in the National Appliance and Radio-Television Dealers Association in the 1950s; he served as the organization's President in 1965; and

WHEREAS, he also served as a member of the Executive Committee of the National Association of Retail Dealers of America and as Director of the Southern Home Furniture Association; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Yates also lent his talents to several of the Dyersburg community's civic boards: he was President of the Dyersburg Jaycees in 1951, he served on the Board of Managers of Methodist Hospitals of Memphis, he was Director of the Dyersburg-Dyer County Chamber of Commerce from 1964 to 1968 and was Chamber Vice-president from 1968 to 1970,

and he was a member of the Board of First Citizens bank for thirty-one years and a member of its Executive Committee as well; and

WHEREAS, from 1966 to 1972, Billy Yates served his community as a member of the Dyersburg Board of Education; during his term, he and his fellow board members oversaw the construction of the current Dyersburg High School; and

WHEREAS, he pursued other avenues of public service as well, serving as Chairman of the Reelfoot Regional Library Board from 1967 to 1968 and as President of the Dyer County Fair Association from 1965 to 1966; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades, Mr. Yates won a number of honors in addition to the 1968 Best Boss of the Year Award; in 1951, he was named as the Outstanding Young Man by the Junior Chamber of Commerce; and

WHEREAS, he received the 1974 Tennessee Retailer of the Year Award and, in 1979, the Dyersburg-Dyer County Chamber of Commerce named him Business Man of the Year; and

WHEREAS, Billy Yates was an active and devout member of the First United Methodist Church in Dyersburg, which he served faithfully for over fifteen years as the teacher of the high school seniors' Sunday School class; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Yates was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, Billy Yates is survived by his wife of almost sixty years, Emmalene Eidson Yates; two sons, William Mark Yates and Joseph Stephen Yates; two daughters, Laura Elizabeth Yates Emerson and Mary Jane Yates Moll; and seven grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, in addition to his parents, a child, Lark Ann Yates, preceded Mr. Yates in death; and

WHEREAS, Billy Yates leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Billy Summers Yates, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Yates.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.